



Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

2019 TCDLA ANNUAL READING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

DATE: April 2, 2019
TO: Organizers of Statewide Readings
FROM: Robb Fickman and Chuck Lanehart, Co-Chairs

INFORMATION & SUGGESTIONS

1. **DATE/TIME:** Statewide readings will take place on the morning of July 3, 2019, at a time that best fits with your local event. If your event must be staged on another date on or around July 4, that's also okay.
2. *NOTE: Many American institutions exemplified by our Bill of Rights are under attack. Therefore, this year, we encourage organizers to include a reading of the Bill of Rights along with your Declaration reading. More information below.*
3. **GOAL:** Our sole goal is to encourage the public reading of the Declaration (and the Bill of Rights) by the criminal defense bar. The tradition began in 2010 in Houston and has steadily grown to encompass every county of our state in 2016. This TCDLA event is not connected to any political organization or movement. We just think it's important to remind people about the meaning of July 4th. That's why we are involved. To watch videos from last year's readings, please go to <http://www.tcdla.com>.
4. **VOLUNTEER ORGANIZER:** If you are reading this, that is probably you. One or two people should be responsible for organizing this event in each jurisdiction. If you have never been involved in organizing a reading and you have questions, don't hesitate to contact Robb Fickman (713-655-7400, rfickman@gmail.com) or Chuck Lanehart (806-765-7370, chucklanehart@hotmail.com).
5. **LOCATION:** Readings should take place directly in front of the county courthouse, if possible. This draws attention and sends a message to those inside the courthouse.
6. **RECRUITING READERS:** Get fellow criminal defense lawyers committed well ahead of the scheduled date to come and read. All criminal defense lawyers are known for their egos, so promise reading parts and make people commit to come. Promise them they will find the experience fun and rewarding. Since the reading is

sponsored by TCDLA, try to give preference to members of TCDLA, or at least to those who regularly defend the citizen accused. We prefer prosecutors and judges as spectators only, but if your local jurisdiction must make an exception because of a scarcity of lawyers or because of tradition, that's okay.

7. THIS IS A CRIMINAL DEFENSE BAR EVENT: *This is a TCDLA, statewide criminal defense bar event. It belongs to the criminal defense bar. We ask that you jealously guard the identity of the event. We do not want it to lose its identity. So please be careful to ALWAYS make certain folks know this is the criminal defense bar's event and belongs to no one else.*
8. DEFENSE BAR ATTENDANCE: Email or otherwise send invitations to your entire criminal defense bar. Encourage lawyers to bring staff and family. *There is not a more meaningful family event, especially for impressionable young children, than a local reading of the Declaration.*
9. OTHER INVITATIONS: Invite the local bar, judiciary, prosecutors, court personnel, the press and the public to attend. Sample invitations are provided.
10. NEWS RELEASE: If you think it appropriate, issue a news release prior to the reading. Even if they don't show up, the media will know the defense bar is doing something positive. You may give your own reasons for being involved. Please remember this is a TCDLA event and only the TCDLA President and his designees speak for TCDLA. A sample news release is included with these materials.
11. FOCUS FOR 2019 READINGS: As you may know, in 2016, TCDLA sponsored readings in every Texas county in commemoration of the 240th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration. This year, we hope to focus on quality over quantity. We want each reading to inspire everyone who participates and everyone who attends, and we want to make sure everyone wants to come back next year. Those of you who enjoyed ventures into the hinterlands in 2016 to read in small counties with no lawyers or few lawyers are certainly encouraged to do it again, but this year you won't be badgered by anyone to travel beyond your hometowns.
12. HOW TO PRODUCE A QUALITY EVENT:
 - THE READING CEREMONY: We have provided a copy of the Declaration, divided into 38 numbered parts. That allows for as many as 38 readers, who may each read one or more parts. There are two schools of thought regarding the reading ceremony: (1) Make sufficient copies for all readers. Then on the morning of the reading, distribute the numbered copies of the Declaration to each reader. Tell each reader what section they are reading. Before you start the reading, call out numbers, having each person with the corresponding number answer present. If there is a large crowd, have the readers come forward and stand at the center of the crowd. Tell them to read loud. You may

want them to face all in the same direction or form a circle. (2) We have learned from experience, when each reader is given a copy of the Declaration, they will tend to keep their heads down during the entire ceremony, reading along as others perform, even if told to look up and pay attention to the reader. This does not make for a quality reading. You may choose instead to print only one copy of the Declaration, tape it to the top of a podium, and direct each reader to the podium to read his or her part. The movement looks good, and the readers will all keep their heads up.

- **OPENING REMARKS:** The organizer or his/her designee is encouraged to make brief remarks just before the reading. No long speeches. It should be mentioned that your local ceremony is part of a larger tradition sponsored by TCDLA to encourage Declaration readings across Texas every year. We think it is very important to recognize in these remarks the historic significance of the Declaration. It is quite understandable that not everyone admires Jefferson, given the fact he owned slaves. We owe it to the African-American community to acknowledge in a sensitive manner that the Declaration did not set one slave free. The Declaration was a historic first step in what remains an ongoing fight for liberty; a fight we as defense lawyers continue.
- **TALK LOUD!** Sound does not travel well outdoors. If you are expecting a large crowd, consider arranging for a sound system/microphone. Remember, your jurisdiction may require a permit for a sound system/microphone. Otherwise, individuals should be encouraged to read **LOUDLY** and with firm resolve, in the way it was intended to be read, making for a more dramatic ceremony. To watch an excellent example of a good reading, go to <http://www.tcdla.com> and see a video of the Harris County Criminal Lawyers Association's reading from last year, which was powerful and inspirational.
- **THE BEST SECTIONS:** The best parts are the first and last. Give those to the people you think are most deserving.
- **BAD LINE ALERT:** There is a line in the Declaration that refers to Native Americans as "savages." However, we cannot re-write the Declaration to make it politically correct. Just read it without comment.
- **BRING EXTRA COPIES:** You might consider making extra copies of the Declaration for the audience. Caution: if you hand out copies before the ceremony, the audience will likely keep their eyes on the paper and not watch the actual readers, which reduces the drama of the event. It might be better to distribute the copies following the ceremony.
- **OTHER SUGGESTIONS:** Each city or town knows what works best for that jurisdiction. Many jurisdictions add bells and whistles to their Declaration

reading ceremonies. Some wear colonial costumes. Some like to open with the Pledge of Allegiance and/or the Texas Pledge. Some sing the National Anthem (“Star-Spangled Banner”) and other patriotic songs. Some have partnered with local dignitaries to make Declaration readings a part of larger Independence Day celebrations. Whatever works best for your local organization is okay.

- This year, we are suggesting an additional reading of the Bill of Rights, since the latter document is so interconnected with the Declaration, and because criminal defense lawyers use the Bill of Rights daily. A script for reading the Bill of Rights is provided. Also, you may go to <http://www.tcdla.com> to view a video of last year’s Lubbock Criminal Defense Lawyers Assn. reading, which included a reading of the Bill of Rights, and was very well received.

13. VIDEO & PHOTOS: Please make sure someone who knows how to use a camera takes *quality photos and videos* during the reading. Proper documentation of the event is a valuable tool for local and TCDLA public relations, and a way to keep the tradition going. Post the photos on social media and make sure to identify the participants and the location. High-resolution photos and videos should also be sent to TCDLA for use in future promotions. Also, landscape—rather than portrait—is the preferred format of photos for TCDLA promotions. Send multiple shots to ensure at least one makes the cut. Remember, if the quality of your photos is poor, your reading will not show up well in TCDLA’s promotions. You will be emailed detailed information later regarding where to send your high-resolution photos and videos.

14. CREATING A TRADITION: It’s a good idea for the organizer to thank everyone for coming and wish them a Happy Independence Day. It is also a good idea to tell them to come back next year and do it again. This helps to establish a tradition. Be prepared to make a few appropriate remarks to the media in case they show up.

Thanks to all of you for volunteering your time to this wonderful statewide tradition. Without Texas criminal defense lawyers like you, this event would not succeed. It will be a success because of you.